United Nations ICCD/CRIC(13)/INF.3

Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.: General
25 March 2015

English only

UNITED NATIONS
DEPOSITORY

JUN 2 2 2015

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
Thirteenth session
Bonn, 25–27 March 2015
Agenda item 4
Formulation, revision and implementation of action programmes in view of the post-2015 sustainable development framework

Interim report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Land Degradation Neutrality

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides information on the interim report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Land Degradation Neutrality. By its decision 8/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD decided to establish an intergovernmental working group to: (1) establish a science-based definition of land degradation neutrality (LDN) in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; (2) develop options relating to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve LDN; and (3) advise the Convention on the implications for its current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements.

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Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–3	3
II.	Background	4–6	3
III.	Science-based definition of land degradation neutrality	7	4
IV.	Options that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve land degradation neutrality	8	4
V.	Implications of land degradation neutrality for the Convention's current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements	9	4
VI.	Next steps	10	5

I. Introduction

1. In recognition of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) contained in "The future we want" (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/288) which, inter alia, calls upon Member States to strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world in the context of sustainable development, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) adopted decision 8/COP.11 to establish an intergovernmental working group (IWG) to follow up on the Rio+20 outcomes related to land degradation neutrality (LDN).

2. The IWG was given three specific tasks, namely to: (1) establish a science-based definition of LDN in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; (2) develop options relating to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve LDN; and (3) advise the Convention on the implications for its current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements. In undertaking its work, the IWG should also take note of the following, inter alia: (a) the ongoing process of elaborating the post-2015 development agenda, including the discussions in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals called for at Rio+20; (b) relevant economic studies and work undertaken by the Science-Policy Interface, as appropriate; and (c) the importance of identifying synergies to avoid duplication among the Rio conventions, other international bodies, and agencies addressing environment and development issues.

3. The COP also decided that the IWG should prepare a report to be submitted to the Bureau of the COP no later than 60 days before the twelfth session of the COP (COP 12) and that this report should be sent for consideration by the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention prior to COP 12.

II. Background

4. Decision 8/COP.11 further specified that the IWG will consist of a maximum of five representatives from each region, nominated by the respective regional groups on the basis of nominations by national governments. Following the nomination of the regional representatives, the IWG met for the first time in Brussels on 10–11 February 2014 to establish its terms of reference and programme of work. During this meeting, the IWG appointed Mr. Nicholas Hanley of the European Union and Mr. Bongani Simon Masuku of Swaziland as its co-chairs. In addition, it was agreed that three task forces would be formed to address the three specific tasks contained in paragraph 1 of decision 8/COP.11, each task force with its own coordinator. Task Force 1 on the definition of LDN was led by Mr. German Kust of the Russian Federation; Task Force 2 on options was led by Ms. Jia Xiaoxia of China; and Task Force 3 on the implications was led by Ms. Belsis Llorente of Cuba. The IWG met again in Beijing on 16–18 July 2014 and in Rome on 18–20 March 2015 for a total of three meetings.

5. The members of Task Forces 1 and 2 corresponded by email to produce working documents for discussion at the second meeting of the IWG. Subsequently, a three-month consultation period from 1 August to 31 October 2014 was opened in order to solicit comments from the UNCCD Parties, civil society organizations and observers on the working documents of Task Forces 1 and 2. During that period, comments were received from nine country Parties and the CST's Science-Policy Interface. Prior to the third meeting of the IWG and taking into account the comments received, the coordinators of Task Forces

1 and 2 revised their working documents and presented the way forward in order to achieve consensus. In addition, the coordinator of Task Force 3 circulated a working document for discussion at the third meeting.

6. During the third and final meeting of the IWG, the members agreed on the final text for its interim report. What follows is a brief summary of the discussion and conclusions arrived at during the third meeting of the IWG for each of three tasks mandated in decision 8/COP.11. These conclusions are subject to the final approval of the IWG members.

III. Science-based definition of land degradation neutrality

7. The coordinator of Task Force 1 provided an overview of the comments received during the consultation period and presented various options for arriving at a consensus on the science-based definition of LDN. The subsequent discussion primarily focused on the scope of the Convention and whether to include "arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas" within the definition. The majority of the IWG members felt that the definition should be universally applicable and that there was no scientific basis for limiting it to "arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas". The majority opinion was that a universally applicable definition could also help to avoid debating the definition in other forums in the future. The final text was agreed with brackets around "arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas".

IV. Options that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve land degradation neutrality

8. Similarly, the coordinator of Task Force 2 presented a revised text based on comments received on the options for achieving LDN should countries wish to do so. There was a consensus view that the options suggested in this text be country-driven, aspirational and voluntary. There was agreement on a set of management and policy options at the national and subnational levels as well as options for operationalizing LDN, including a non-exhaustive list of interlinked activities. The final text on options includes the same bracketed text as in the definition text, namely "arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas".

V. Implications of land degradation neutrality for the Convention's current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements

9. The coordinator of Task Force 3 on the implications of LDN for the Convention presented draft text to the entire IWG for the first time. The initial discussion revealed the consensus view that the objectives of the Convention and its existing operation are fully consistent with the objective of LDN, and thus the IWG saw no useful purpose in amending the current the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy). In organizing the future work of the Convention, the group presented two options for when the current Strategy expires, acknowledging that there are numerous other options which could be considered. Likewise for programmes and resources requirements, the implications for LDN were framed in general terms with illustrative examples of options to consider in this regard. The only bracketed text in this section concerns the language on "technology transfers and capacity building", where consensus is still possible before issuing the final report.

VI. Next steps

10. In closing the third and final meeting of the IWG, the Co-Chairs presented the next steps whereby they would prepare an introduction outlining the IWG deliberation process in factual terms and submit it for the review and approval of the IWG. This would then be compiled with the final text of the three Task Forces agreed to at the third meeting of the IWG without further editing or commentary, and presented as one report to the COP. The final IWG report will be delivered to the UNCCD secretariat sometime in June 2015 for dissemination in all official languages to the Parties at least 60 days before COP 12.

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